

# *Social Security*

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## Food Stamps And Other Nutrition Programs



[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

# About This Leaflet

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The federal, state and local governments provide many programs designed to help meet nutritional needs of low-income people and their families. Although we don't run any of them, we're trained to refer you to the agency responsible for any programs you might be eligible for. We have a special working relationship with social service agencies that run the food stamp program. In some cases, we can even take a food stamp application.

This leaflet explains who can get food stamps and how to apply for them. It also has a section on other nutrition programs that are available.

## Can You Get Food Stamps?

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To get food stamps, you and the other people in your household must meet certain conditions. (Your household includes everyone who buys and prepares food together.)

Everyone in your household must have or apply for a Social Security number and be in one of the following categories:

- citizens or nationals of the United States;
- legally admitted for permanent residence and have a total of 40 qualifying work credits (work credits earned by a spouse or parent may count toward the 40 credits, but only for Supplemental Security Income—SSI—eligibility purposes);

- certain noncitizens who are legally admitted for permanent residence and who are active duty members, or who are honorably discharged veterans of the U.S. armed forces, their spouses and unmarried dependent children; or
- certain American Indians who are born outside the U.S. or who are members of federally recognized Indian tribes.

Certain other noncitizens may be eligible for seven years after:

- the date of admission as a refugee under section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA);
- the date granted asylum under section 208 of the INA; or
- the date deportation is withheld under section 243(h) of the INA, as in effect before April 1, 1997, or the date removal has been withheld under Section 241(b) (3) of the INA;
- the date admitted as an Amerasian immigrant under section 584 of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 1988; or
- the date granted status as a Cuban or Haitian entrant as defined in section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980.

Most able-bodied people between the ages of 18 and 60 must register for work. Many people may be required to participate in an employment and training program. Some college students also may be eligible.

Generally, your household can't have more than \$2,000 in resources. But, if your household includes a person age 60 or older, the limit is \$3,000. Resources include cash, bank accounts and other property.

Not all resources count. For example, your home and the lot it's on don't count. A car or truck counts differently, depending on how it's used.

Most households also must meet an income limit after certain deductions have been subtracted. Your household may qualify for extra deductions if there is a person age 60 or older or disabled. The income limits vary by household size and change each year.

**Note:** If everyone in your household gets SSI payments or Aid to Dependent Children, you don't have to meet additional resource or income limits.

## What Amount Of Food Stamps Can You Get?

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If your household is eligible, the amount of food stamps you get depends on your monthly household income and expenses for such things as:

- mortgage or rent;
- utility costs; and
- child and/or elderly family member care costs needed to allow someone to work.

Medical expenses above \$35 a month for elderly and disabled people are deducted from income if they aren't paid by another party such as Medicaid, Medicare or an insurance company.

## How To Apply For Food Stamps

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Food stamp applications are available at any Social Security office. If you and the rest of your household buy and prepare your food for yourselves and are applying for or getting SSI payments, **the Social Security office will help you fill out the food stamp application and will send it to the food stamp office.**

All others must take or send the food stamp application to the local food stamp office. Or, they can take it to the Social Security office if a food stamp worker is there.

When you apply, you also should have:

- some identification that shows your name and address;
- proof of earnings or other income, such as Social Security or SSI benefits, or a pension, for each member of your household;
- proof of how much you spend for child care;
- rent receipts or proof of your mortgage payments;
- records of your utility costs; and

- medical bills for those members of your household age 60 or over and for those getting Social Security or SSI benefits because they are disabled.

You should find out if you're eligible within 30 days. If you don't hear by then, call or visit the food stamp office. You can apply for food stamps at anytime during the month; there is no advantage to applying at the beginning or end of any given month.

## Homeless People And Food Stamps

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If you are homeless, there are special provisions to help you receive food stamps:

- your claim will be given priority handling;
- your eligibility will be based solely on your circumstances;
- you may use your food stamps at approved eating facilities, such as some “soup kitchens” and certain restaurants.

You are considered homeless if you don't have a fixed regular nighttime residence or your primary nighttime residence is a temporary accommodation in:

- a supervised shelter;
- a halfway house;
- the residence of another person; or
- a place not designed for regular sleeping, such as a hallway, bus station or lobby.

## Other Nutrition Programs Available

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The food stamp program is just one of many nutrition programs available. The federal government and many state and local government agencies sponsor numerous programs that provide people with information about, and access to, a more nutritious diet. Many of these programs also are intended to improve the health and eating habits of children. Here are two examples:

### *Special Supplemental Food Program For Women, Infants and Children (WIC)*

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The WIC program provides nutritious foods that add to the diets of pregnant and nursing women, infants and children under five years of age. It also provides nutrition education and access to health services.

WIC is administered by the Department of Agriculture through the state health departments. Eligibility is based on income and nutritional risk as determined by a health professional.

Contact your state or local health department for more information about this program.

## *The Nutrition Program For The Elderly (NPE)*

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NPE is a food program designed to assist older people. It is run by the Department of Health and Human Services through the state agencies on aging. NPE is part of the Grants for State and Community Programs on Aging, which also authorizes in-home services for the frail elderly, supportive services and senior center operations. The nutrition services program assists elderly Americans by providing them with nutritious meals.

If you are age 60 or older, you are eligible for the program and so is your spouse, even if he or she isn't 60 years old. Age is the only factor used to decide if you are eligible. You do not have to meet any income limits to receive meals under the program.

Neighborhood centers for the elderly serve well-balanced, hot or cold meals at least once a day, five days a week. When possible, transportation is offered to and from the sites for those who need it. Home-delivered meals, usually called "Meals on Wheels," are provided to elderly people who are home bound.

For more information about this program, contact your local office on aging or ask your local Social Security office.



# More Food Programs

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There are other food programs administered by the Department of Agriculture.

- Several **food distribution programs** give commodities to needy households or to organizations that provide meal service to low-income people, including soup kitchens, churches and homeless shelters.
- **The Child and Adult Care Food Program** offers meals and snacks to children in eligible day care centers, family day care homes and other care centers, as well as to functionally impaired adults and elderly persons in day care situations,
- **The School Lunch and Breakfast Programs** offer meals at school to children. Low-income children receive these meals free or at a reduced price, while other children have access to reasonably priced meals.
- **The Summer Food Service Program** offers free meals and snacks to needy children during the months when school is not in session.

For more information about these programs, contact your local social services office.

# Food Stamps

Help, Information and Applications  
Available At Any Social Security Office

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Getting or  
applying only for  
Social Security?

YOU CAN GET A  
FOOD STAMP  
APPLICATION  
AND  
INFORMATION  
AT ANY SOCIAL  
SECURITY  
OFFICE.

We cannot take  
food stamp  
applications  
from people  
getting or  
applying **only** for  
Social Security.

Getting or applying  
for Supplemental  
Security Income  
(SSI)?

YOU CAN APPLY  
FOR FOOD  
STAMPS AT ANY  
SOCIAL SECURITY  
OFFICE IF YOU  
AND EVERYONE  
IN YOUR  
HOUSEHOLD  
GET OR APPLY  
FOR SSI.

We will help you  
fill out the food  
stamp application.  
You do not have to  
go to the food  
stamp office  
to apply.

**Social Security Administration**

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